

Target for smear:

**JOHN BIRCH
SOCIETY**



Target for Smear: JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY

My name is Cleon Skousen. Although I am not a member of the John Birch Society, I have closely observed the avalanche of blistering propaganda which has left millions of Americans totally confused about this organization.

A personal check among your neighbors and friends may reveal that a vast quantity of well-educated, rational, religious people count it a shining virtue to hate the John Birch Society. Yet, these people admit knowing practically nothing about it.

I first heard of the John Birch Society in 1958. Several prominent businessmen in Los Angeles told me they were organizing a study group program to see if they could work more closely with the members of Congress through both political parties. They said they believed Americans should study legislation while it was up before Congress and not wait until it has been passed into law before they began complaining.

They advised that these study groups were going to be set up all over the country and each one would be called a "chapter" of the John Birch Society.

I began paying attention to the literature and personalities of the John Birch Society to see what kind of group it might turn out to be.

It was not difficult to find out about the Society. The organization published a "Blue Book" which described its purposes and the identity of its leadership. Members of its Council included many nationally prominent people, some of whom I knew personally.

The "Blue Book" was written by Robert Welch, the founder and head of the John Birch Society. Until his retirement in 1957, Mr. Welch was vice president in charge of sales and advertising for a large candy manufacturing firm. In addition to being a successful businessman, Mr. Welch had served on the board of directors of the National Association of Manufacturers, had traveled around the world extensively and had spent several years specializing in the study of Communism and Socialism. He had graduated from the University of North Carolina at the age of 16, then attended the Naval Academy two years and then Harvard law school. Mr. Welch had published three books and served as editor and publisher of "American Opinion," a monthly magazine designed to evaluate current events in terms of the world-wide struggle for power by the Communist-Socialist coalition.

I was told by officials of the John Birch Society that Mr. Welch was paid no salary by them even though he worked an 18-hour day.

I found that chapters of the John Birch Society were being built around people who had already been studying Communism. These individuals then invited into the chapter the people who were interested in staying informed. They pledged themselves to work through their respective political parties to stop the advance of Communism and Socialism in the United States.

They seemed neither secret nor exclusive.

By the summer of 1960, the Society had attracted the attention of other conservative groups. A few were critical because they said the Birch people had rallied together most of the best informed and hardest working patriots in many cities. I observed, however, that members of the Society did not restrict their support to John Birch groups but seemed anxious to help other conservative movements succeed as well.

It is my personal opinion that the real cause of the wrath against the John Birch Society originated with a series of events in the Fall of 1960.

Birch members had learned that the Communist Party was working for passage of a certain bill which was to be introduced as soon as Congress convened in January, 1961. This bill was designed to take away the funds of the House Committee on Un-American Activities so that it could not investigate the Communist Party. For many years the destruction of this particular committee in Congress had been a major project of the Communists in the United States. Since they had always failed in the past they thought this new strategy of taking most of the funds away from the committee should be a good stopgap measure. And for awhile it looked as though it might succeed.

Then the John Birch Society and other conservative groups began an all-out campaign to work through both parties to kill this bill. All through the Christmas vacation they continued the campaign. The success of these efforts became apparent when the bill came up for vote. Democrats and Republicans combined to beat the bill by a vote of 412 to 6. It was an overwhelming defeat for a favorite project of the Communist Party.

Whether John Birch members actually deserved all the credit for what happened is not so important, but the Communist Party certainly gave them all the blame and the communist party bosses sent out the word: "The John Birchers have got to go!".

At the time the Birch members were working to defeat this Communist-supported bill, a manifesto came out of Moscow from the conference of the 81 Communist parties of the world ordering a "resolute struggle against anti-Communism."

Edward Hunter analyzed this new directive for Congress and testified as follows:

"For the first time, the world Communist network, in a basic policy and operational document, specifically referred to the anti-Communist movement in the United States, recognizing that it had reached proportions large enough to constitute a main — if not the main — danger to Communist progress in our country. . . ."

The Moscow manifesto against anti-Communism came out in December, 1960, and one month later Nikita Khrushchev gave an important policy speech officially ordering all communists to destroy all forms of anti-Communism. Said he:

"Bourgeois propaganda is assuming an increasingly cunning nature. Its main weapon in the struggle against the Socialist camp and the Communist Parties is anti-communism."²

A short time later the opening blast against all anti-Communists in the United States was initiated by a concentrated attack on the John Birch Society.

Almost immediately, scathing denunciations began pouring down upon this organization, and it came from all directions. It was amazing to me that the legitimate American Press would fall for the line, but for one solid year the press, radio and TV saturated the American mind with a continuous attack on the so-called "terrible Birchers."

It was actually on February 25, 1961, that the official Communist newspaper on the West Coast called the "People's World," fired the opening broadside in an article which was entitled, "ENTER (from Stage Right) THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY."

The article depicted the John Birchers as a secret, Fascist society and said that it was setting up "cells" all across the country.

Of course, the "People's World" has a very limited distribution which would do little damage, but the thing which was most astonishing was the rapidity with which the transmission belt began to function. This story was planted in one major news medium after another until finally even some of the more conservative papers had taken up the hue and cry.

The very next week "Time" magazine came out with a long article similar in many ways to the one in the "People's World." As soon as I read the first paragraph I knew the John Birch Society was in for a real professional tarbrush treatment. The article said:

"Among the U.S. brotherhoods dedicated to the fight against Communism, nothing is quite like the John Birch Society. Except for an elite corps of leaders, its members shun personal publicity and their names are held by the society in strictest secrecy. Its cells, of 20 to 30 members apiece, take orders from society headquarters, promote Communist-style front organizations. . . . Carefully avoiding normal channels of political action, the society accepts the hard-boiled, dictatorial direction of one man who sees democracy as a "perennial fraud" and estimates that the U.S. is 40-60% Communist-controlled. In other times, other places, the John Birch 'Americanists' — as they call themselves — might seem a tiresome, comic opera joke. But already the society admits to cells in 35 states, and its partisans have made their anonymous and unsettling presence felt in scores of U.S. communities."

It was immediately apparent even to an outsider that this article was no ordinary piece of reporting. Why did it call the chapters of the John Birch Society "cells" just like the article in the "People's World"? Why did it charge that the Birchers avoided "normal channels of political action" when their greatest success had been achieved by working with Congressmen in both political parties. Why the non-specific charge that the Birchers promote "Communist-style front organizations"? What front organizations?

Why take a statement concerning democracy by Robert Welch completely out of text to make it look like he was against our form of government? And why the charge of "secrecy"? I knew that meetings were neither secret nor

closed. Finally, why should the activities of the John Birch Society be described as "unsettling" when their only objective was to resist Communism and educate the public in preserving constitutional principles?

No organization is above criticism on some scores, but why should one of the foremost American news magazines resort to fiction and distortions within a week after similar fiction and distortions appeared in an official Communist periodical?

The "Time" magazine article was further dignified on March 8, 1961, when Senator Milton Young of North Dakota had it appear in the Congressional Record.⁵ As other periodicals aimed their printer's ink at the John Birch Society, Senator Young included their contributions in the Congressional Record as well.

I noticed that a whole roster of favorite Communist smear terms began to find expression in the legitimate American press. These included: Fascists, Extremists, Super-patriots, Lunatic Fringe, Ultra-rightists, Patriotic Fanatics, etc.

In spite of these colorful epithets, however, some Americans began demanding concrete facts to back up these charges. They began asking what specifically was so terrible about the John Birch members. It was always a little disconcerting to the anti-Birchers when people did a little checking as I had done and discovered that the Society was primarily a study group program with a strong bias in favor of traditional American Constitutionalism.

Then the attack shifted its aim away from the Society itself and concentrated almost entirely on Robert Welch. The critics went back to some statements Mr. Welch had made around the time the Eisenhower Administration was backing Castro as "the George Washington of Cuba." Mr. Welch predicted that since Castro had been a member of the Soviet apparatus for many years he would undoubtedly betray the Cuban people into the clutches of the Soviet Union. Mr. Welch also insisted that since Castro's record was so notorious, President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Christian Herter were playing into the trap of world Communism by supporting Castro.

Mr. Welch was equally critical of other decisions by President Eisenhower and his aides when he had allowed unnecessary Communist gains. In a private communication to several of his friends, now in book form entitled "The Politician," he expressed the opinion that some of the national leaders were involved in outright Communist duplicity.

This private communication was written prior to the founding of the John Birch Society and such opinions were therefore never part of the Society's policies or principles.

In the midst of all this clamor, Robert Welch suggested that a good way to settle the matter would be through an official Congressional investigation. Let the people make their charges but make them under oath. Welch suggested that he would welcome an investigation and would answer under oath any question the members of Congress might wish to ask him.

However, it was not the U.S. Congress, but the California

State Legislature which finally decided to conduct an investigation.

Trained investigators were sent out by the California Senate Fact-finding Sub-committee on Un-American Activities and their report released in June 1963 came as a great shock to those people who had proclaimed that the attacks on the John Birch Society would be factually proven by this group. They even had predicted that this California report would undoubtedly destroy the Birchers.⁶

Hugh M. Burns (Democrat), chairman of the California Senate Factfinding Committee, used 61 pages of fine print to report what the committee investigators had found.

This official committee report stated:

"We have not found the society to be either a secret or a fascist organization, nor have we found the great majority of its members in California to be mentally unstable, crackpots, or hysterical about the threat of Communist subversion."⁷

The report further disclosed:

"... , our investigations have disclosed no evidence of anti-Semitism on the part of anyone connected with the John Birch Society in California, and much evidence to the effect that it opposes racism in all forms."⁸

Concerning the John Birch Society as an organization, the California Senate Report said:

"We find the John Birch Society to be a Right, anti-Communist, fundamentalist organization. It was conceived, organized, and is dominated by Mr. Robert Welch, who runs the society with the aid of a National Council and Advisory Committee, whose advice he is not, however, bound to follow."⁹

Robert Welch was discussed in great length by this official factfinding body. They reported:

"We have studied Welch's life, his business career, educational background, and have read almost everything he wrote — all his writings in connection with the society. We do not agree with much of what he wrote or what he has said, but we did not find him embittered, either through reading his writings or through personally interrogating him."¹⁰

The committee further acknowledged that:

"There is no question, as National Review points out, that he has stirred the slumbering spirt of patriotism in thousands of Americans, roused them from lethargy, and changed their apathy into a deep desire to first learn the facts about communism and then implement that knowledge with effective and responsible action."¹¹

Committee investigators attended chapter meetings, interviewed John Birch members and then reported:

"We have found the average member to have been concerned about the advances of the world Communist movement and the advances of Communist subversion in this country. The John Birch Society has provided the only organization with a militant program of study and action through which the frustrations of these people can be released."¹²

Communists, like unthinking robots, are trained to obey a

directive or party assignment, whether they agree with it or not. In contrast to this, the report stressed that:

"Members of the (John Birch) society are constantly told NOT to follow any program or directive unless they agree with it, as may be seen in many of the monthly bulletins sent to the members. When the policies and actions of the society are no longer supported by a member, he may resign and get a proportional rebate of his annual dues."¹³

Answering the question of why have so many people joined the John Birch Society, the committee said:

"We believe that the reason the John Birch Society has attracted so many members is that it simply appeared to them to be the most effective, indeed the only, organization through which they could join in a national movement to learn the truth about the Communist menace and then take some positive concerted action to prevent its spread."¹⁴

The report also pointed out the Communist Party involvement in the smear campaign against the John Birch Society.

"The attack against the John Birch Society commenced with an article in the 'People's World,' California Communist paper, in February, 1961, . . ."¹⁵

A more recent report issued by this same California Senate Investigating Committee in 1965 upheld the earlier findings concerning the John Birch Society.¹⁶

Everything I have personally observed about the John Birch Society would confirm the conclusions reached by these California Senate reports.

My final thought would be this:

I certainly would have no quarrel with anyone who wished to disagree with some idea promulgated by the John Birch Society. In a Republic this should be expected. However, no American should stand by and see a legitimate group of American citizens dishonestly ridiculed and smeared at the instigation of the international Communist conspiracy.

And even more important, no American should allow himself to become involved in debasing and ridiculing a group of fellow citizens when he honestly doesn't know anything about them. In the case of the John Birch Society, those who editorialized or otherwise propagandized against "the so-called terrible Birchers" usually did so without realizing they were promoting the official Communist Party line. And, as usual, this line turned out to be a carefully calculated deception designed to confuse the American people.

The Communist Party is manifestly frightened by the possibility of the people of the United States becoming awakened for Communist success has always been achieved in an atmosphere of secrecy, deceit and confusion. The John Birch Society was therefore one of the groups marked for annihilation because it was becoming highly successful in awakening the American people.

A former member of the Communist Party National Committee personally told me, "The Communist leaders look upon the stamping out of the John Birch Society as a matter of life and death for the Party."

This is really a tribute to the effectiveness of the John Birch Society for the FBI and the House Committee on

Un-American Activities are the only two other organizations that have generated this much hate and fury from Communist leaders.

Today, many Americans seem content to allow others to do their thinking for them. They thereby become unwitting tools of the enemies of Freedom who constantly fill the land with deceitful propaganda. This can be avoided if more Americans will inform themselves concerning the Communist conspiracy. We must face up to our individual responsibilities if this land of individual freedom is to be preserved for future generations. The truth can keep us free.

ABOUT THE NARRATOR

W. Cleon Skousen is well qualified to comment with authority on the subject of Communist subversion in the United States. In addition to being the author of the best-selling book, "The Naked Communist," his background includes 16 years with the FBI, 4 years as Chief of Police of Salt Lake City and 7 years as the Editorial Director of "Law and Order," the most widely distributed police magazine in the United States.

Mr. Skousen received his LLB(law) from George Washington University and for some time held a position on the faculty of Brigham Young University. He travels and lectures extensively throughout the United States and in many foreign countries.

FOOTNOTES

1. "The New Drive Hearing Against The Anti-Communist Program," Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Internal Security, Washington, D.C., July 11, 1961, Pg. 10.
2. "Analysis of the Khrushchev Speech of January 6, 1961," Senate Judiciary Committee Report, June 16, 1961, Pg. 74.
3. People's World, Feb. 25, 1961.
4. Time Magazine, March 10, 1961, Pg. 21.
5. Congressional Record, March 8, 1961.
6. 12th Report Un-American Activities in California, 1963.
7. Ibid. Pg. 61
8. Ibid. Pg. 39
9. Ibid. Pg. 61
10. Ibid. Pg. 31
11. Ibid. Pg. 37
12. Ibid. Pg. 42
13. Ibid. Pg. 18
14. Ibid. Pg. 61-62
15. Ibid. Pg. 25
16. 13th Report Un-American Activities in California, 1965.

This is the script of a 23-minute full-color
35mm sound filmstrip.

Available from:

PUBLIUS & ASSOCIATES
9929 Las Tunas Drive
Temple City, California 91780

Prices for additional copies of this script:

10/\$1 — 100/\$6 — 500/\$25